21: Htin Aung E-5 (ca. 1930) 1937 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

With all its faults, the play achieves what it sets out to do. It tries to compromise between the tradition of dramatic scholarship on the one hand, and the demands of the audience and the desires of the acting profession on the other. To make the compromise possible, Saya Yaw has to evolve a new interpretation of the old doctrine that the essence of dramatic technique was the logical and clear unfolding of the plot.[1] The great achievement of this play is in the way the songs and dances are knit into it. The characters sing only when they are very happy or sad, and special dances are brought into the play in a masterly way; the Shan dance is introduced through the incidents connected with the Shan merchants, and a *nat*-spirit dance through the device of making the sister such a spirit after death. The ending of the play must have satisfied both the audience and the actors. It was sentimental, pathetic, and strange enough for the decadent audience, and it afforded an opportunity for the actors to show some spirit-dancing—the basis of their profession. The lyrics and the poetical language of the play satisfied the scholar-dramatists and brought back the drama definitely to the old tradition.[2]

3. *The Baboon Brother and Sister*

The History of Thaton was immensely popular, and it was produced repeatedly all over Lower Burma, and even troubled Upper Burma saw it performed sometimes. Within a few weeks of publication, 15,000 copies of the play in book form were sold. The figure was gigantic for those days, and the people were astounded. In spite of the fact that he was now looked upon as the greatest among contemporary dramatists, Saya Yaw wrote no other play. In fact, although there is ample evidence in the play that he was intimately connected with the drama and the acting profession, the *History* is the only dramatic work he ever composed. Many imitations of the successful play were put on the stage and published, but they were unworthy of their model, and the appetite of the public for the drama remained unsatisfied until U Ku composed *The Baboon Brother and Sister*.

U Ku was an able musician and song-writer. He had been connected with the drama long before *The Baboon Brother and Sister* (his first play), for he had been adviser to many acting troupes as he was a noted student of dramatic theory and practice. He wrote and

[1] This new conception of dramatic technique is considered in detail in s. 5.
[2] An extract from this play is given in appendix x.

25: Ferrars E-5 (ca. 1890) 1901 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

still is used by the Shans for their sacred MSS. The Burmans use the paper chiefly in the form of stiff tablets (*parabĕik*), blackened, like the *thimbôn*, for writing on with a steatite pencil. Burmese type was cut (No. 452) and the first printing-plant set up in Burma by the American Baptist Mission. At present

274. PALM-LEAF MS.

there are a number of printing establishments owned by Burmans, from which quite a literature of their religious works has issued. At first the Buddhists of Burma considered print not good enough for the scripture canon. Modernised legends of the Buddha in his previous incarnations (*zat*) are beginning to form the foundation of a romance-literature of indigenous type. Newspapers have not yet taken a firm hold, even in the large towns; but news travels very fast in the ordinary way, especially news about the prices of goods. This western art has not contributed to the spread of western knowledge in the way that might be expected. The Yaw Mindyi, a minister of the late King Mindôn Min, made a most praiseworthy effort to popularise western ideas in a series of MS. treatises. A native undertaking upon a grand scale—nothing less than a Burmese encyclopædia—was on foot in the sixties, but fell through for want of organised support. In Japan, an analogous enterprise was successful. What applies to concerted action in matters like the above, applies equally to political combination. Few Burmans, even after years of schooling, learn enough to read an English newspaper with profit. To this day there is no Burmese manual for the study of English. The scholars learn only enough of the language to procure them employment as accountants and copyists. Similarly, there are few English who can understand a Burmese newspaper.

275. COPYIST AT WORK.

Dealers, with the exception of the